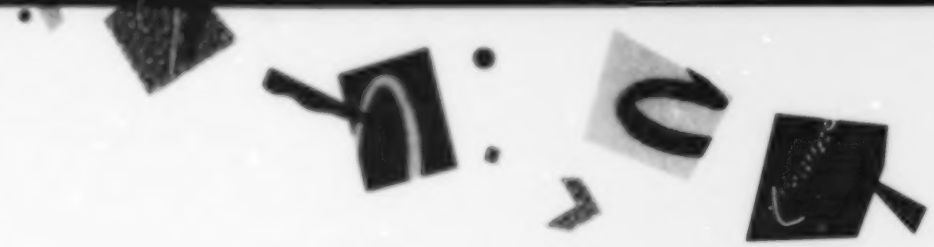

CELEBRATING

ALBERTA'S FAMILIES

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Families Today: Change, Diversity and Challenge

The judgements and opinions reflected in this paper are solely the views of the author and do not necessarily represent the position of the Alberta Government.

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Abstract

Family in Canada today is no longer private. It is news. Family changes and challenges are recounted regularly in newspapers and magazines. Yet, many of us know less than we might want to know about what family has come to be. What is family now compared to what it was? What contexts are appropriate for assessing family changes? Why is there so much interest (both public and personal) in families today? What are the important changes in Canadian families? And what do they mean? What are some of the challenges to families of the future? These questions are the subject matter of this overview of recent (and historical) changes in Canada, with an emphasis on Alberta families. Relying on the most recent and reliable data, this paper offers a glimpse of family change, challenge, diversity, and endurance.

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Families are getting alot of attention these days. Few in Canada can be unaware that families are changing. In Canada, as in the rest of the industrialized world, these changes are numerous and dramatic.

Family in Canada today is NEWS. A brief (non-random) sample of recent magazine and newspaper headlines is revealing: The 80's were Tough on the Nuclear Family (Edmonton Journal, 30 Dec. 1989)/ Family Incomes Up, Poverty Levels Down (EJ, 5 Dec. 1989)/ Family Format Keeps Changing (EJ, 16 Oct. 1989)/ The High Cost of Raising Kids (EJ, 30 Sept. 1989)/ Family Stress Affects Two-Thirds of Workers (Globe and Mail, 22 Sept. 1989)/ The 21st Century Family (Newsweek, Winter-Spring, 1990)/ The Horror of Sex Crimes against Children (Maclean's, 27 November 1989).

"...it is sometimes difficult to sort out what is REALLY happening with Canadian families today -- to separate change from crisis, to discover what is new about family changes today, to figure out what to do about it all, if anything."

With all the public attention given to family today, it is sometimes difficult to sort out what is REALLY happening with Canadian families today -- to separate change from crisis, to discover what is new about family changes today, to figure out what to do about it all, if anything. In addition, the challenges to understanding are made larger because we all feel as if we are experts on family and what families are, and should be, as a result of our membership in families.

"Families continue to be valued by us as individuals and by society for many of the same reasons they always have."

There is, without doubt, change in families today. But there is also remarkable continuity. Families continue to be valued by us as individuals and by society for many of the same reasons they always have. Families are places for caring, for sharing across generations, for having babies, and for intimacy (sexual and personal). Even extended family ties, which many feel are diminishing in importance as families live further apart, have been found to be alive and well among many groups in Canada (Luxton, 1987).

Sometimes family change today is viewed as if change was something unknown to family until recently. Change, in fact, is built into the very idea of family. Growth, birth, death are all part of the family life cycle. Families, by their very definition, must change as family members age, as children grow up and leave home, as parents become grandparents. Families would not be families without change!

Some, concerned about family changes today, have in mind a model of what families were in the past. A common belief is that until recently, Canadians lived in big, self-sufficient, stable and happy extended families. While some of us may come from families like this, the realities of families in the past for most people, were quite different. An impressive number of recent studies of Canadian families in the past have shown that families changed dramatically over time in Canada, in both form and function (see Gaffield; McDaniel and Mitchinson, 1987; and Nett, 1981 for summaries of these findings). For much of Canadian history, family instability was the norm, most often occasioned by the death of the husband before the children had left home. Earlier death meant that people lived in two-generation families (parents and children) more often than in extended families. There is no evidence to suggest that poverty, family violence and sexual abuse are new to Canadian families. Rather, it seems that they were seldom spoken about, leaving the victim to suffer alone and without social support. Marriage was seen as a virtual requirement for adult women, leaving those women who made unhappy marriages at the discretion of their husbands who could, by law, define wives (and children) as possessions to do with what they might (Gaffield, 1984; Nett, 1981). Even the treatment of older family members in Canada in the past was not as wonderful as we might think. Nett (1981) informs us that in the 19th century, some grown children turned out their widowed mothers from the family farm so that they could take possession.

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Despite the problems families have faced in the past and the challenges they continue to face, family has endured and continues to endure (Nikols, 1989). Families in Canada are ever-changing, ever-enduring.

What is Family?

In spite of the fact that family membership is a dominant aspect of most of our lives and in spite of all the talk about family these days, a definition of family is not easy. Family is many things. Closeup, it is a personal experience. Good (or bad) as one's personal experience might be, it is more important than ever today NOT to generalize to everyone else on the basis of one's own

"...if any single word could be said to characterize families in Canada today, that word would be DIVERSITY."

experience. Families have become too diverse in Canada for us to assume that our experiences, whatever they might be, are typical (Burke, 1986; Eichler, 1988; McDaniel, 1989b; Nikols, 1988). In fact, if any single word could be said to characterize families in Canada today, that word would be DIVERSITY.

Looking at family from a distance, we see family as a social institution. Family, seen this way, is linked to all of society. For example, it provides new employees and entrepreneurs for the economy, by not only giving birth to the new generation, but also by teaching children useful life skills so that they, when grown, can assume places in the work force. Family also controls its members, as every child knows who has been forced to go to school by his/her parents. Family also teaches children values. So, families do important work for the benefit of society.

"An idealized image of family can, at times, seem more real than our own family lives."

Family is also an idea, a symbol. This approach to family is perhaps least well understood, and yet it is family as symbol that exerts the most power over us (Nikols, 1988). An idealized image of family can, at times, seem more real than our own family lives. We can long for what is lost, even as we know that what we long for might never have existed! This is what is known as the "world we have lost syndrome" (McDaniel, 1988a; 1989b). The power of strong fictional images of what family could be, takes over our imaginations. By comparison, real family life with its daily challenges might seem less appealing.

Considering Family Change in Context

How we see family matters in what we see. A good example of this is to think of the same house as seen through the eyes of the owner, a real estate agent, and a demolition expert. How we look at something matters not only to what we see, but also to our emotional reactions to what we see. An owner of a house could become quite upset to think of his/her house as a demolition expert might see it! Perspective is emotion-laden, and not provable by scientific evidence, no matter how sound.

Take the example of singleparent families. My hunch would be that a random group of thoughtful people in Alberta might believe

that the rate of singleparent families in Canada has never been higher than it is today. Given all the attention to the high rates of divorce and marital separation, this would not be surprising. As it turns out, the rate of single parenthood in Canada (from all causes) in 1986 is lower than it was in 1941, as shown in Figure 1. The predominant cause of single parenthood has shifted from widowhood, to divorce and separation, but the overall rate is lower today than in 1941. What one is thinking of when thinking of single parenthood matters greatly in this example. A graduate student once told me that she hadn't been raised in singleparent family....her mother had been a widow when she was growing up!

"The predominant cause of single parenthood has shifted from widowhood, to divorce and separation, but the overall rate is lower today than in 1941."

The time frame we use to consider family change also matters in what we see. If, for example, we compare today's families with those of the 1930's, some of us might think that things are getting better. Many more families today, for example, can afford the basic necessities of life than they could in the Depression in Canada. More children today, if they wish to, can have the opportunity to complete high school and go on to college or university. If, however, we compare families today with families in the 1950's, another picture emerges. In the 50's, divorce was less common than today, although not unheard of. Families were larger -- this was the baby boom peak. And mothers less often worked outside the home. Fathers were breadwinners and could generally support their families on one salary. This was the kind of family portrayed in the TV series, Father Knows Best, and Leave it to Beaver. Compared to what for some was the good life of the 1950's, family today may seem more diverse and more problematic.

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So, whether we see the family as getting better or worse depends on the time frame we use.

There is also the issue of family change for whom. Family life experience is not the same for all members of families. What might be great for one individual could be less than great for another. The 1930's, for example, was without doubt, tough for parents trying to support families when they couldn't find work. But, from the child's viewpoint, the adversity of the Depression could have been seen as something which brought the family closer. Similarly, the 1950's may have been seen as a time of good

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and plenty for those fortunate enough to have jobs that could support a family on one wage. Not all did. From the point of view of the woman isolated in the suburbs with children, the 1950's may not have been quite so wonderful, as writers as diverse as Margaret Laurence and Betty Friedan have pointed out.

How family is seen in society's eyes at any given time also matters in assessing family change. For example, families were not seen as being particularly centred on the future of children until the industrialization of Canada (Gaffield, 1984; Nett, 1981). At that time, new ideals of family were put forward which defined the role of women as being more home-centred and child-oriented. Prior to this time, children were seen as part of the agricultural enterprise which they would learn from their parents and go into as adults. Education and "proper" upbringing within families began to be important only at the time that the industrial order supplanted agriculture.

"Education and "proper" upbringing within families began to be important only at the time that the industrial order supplanted agriculture."

Families today are less often seen by society as places where productive work goes on, but as places of leisure, of retreat from the world of work (Baker, 1984, Chapter 1; Boyd, 1988; Eichler, 1988; McDaniel, 1988a). A popular idea today is that families enjoy each other's company and like to have time to do things together, whenever possible. This emerging view of family means that more is expected of family members in relational terms than in the past. For families with good relations, this is a welcome change. For those who are on less good terms, or have close friends outside of family, the change may not be welcome.

The view that family is private is also important to understanding family change in context (Eichler, 1988; Luxton, 1987). Is what families contribute to society seen as less valuable because it is done in private and is not paid work? On the one hand, we argue that family work (raising children, caring for each other, looking after Grandma) is fundamental and valued work in society. On the other hand, we tend to demean those who do this work, by giving them low status in society and paying them less well (even if they do this work in the paid labour force) (Eichler, 1988; McDaniel, 1988a). Much of the work done by families for society remains invisible, until something goes wrong. Then, often as not, the family is held accountable.

"Much of the work done by families for society remains invisible, until something goes wrong."

Interestingly, the value of work families do for society is becoming more visible in Canada now in light of the contemporary discussion of family, family policy and how to best help families do their important work for society (McDaniel, 1989b; McDaniel, 1991). It is being acknowledged in public that families are VERY important to society and to our future. It is also being increasingly recognized that some families may not be able to continue to do this vital work without social supports (Nikols, 1988).

Why Families Now?

Family has become a buzzword. It pops up so often in political speeches, in the news, and in the writings of social analysts that we cannot help but ask why? And why now?

The answers to this question are as complex as family changes themselves. One answer is that families are changing -- and change fascinates us. Family, as a social institution, may be going through a transformation, with a new family system about to emerge ("Why Families Now?" 1989). If this is true, we may be curious about the new family system and want to know why the old system is disappearing. We may see the family as a bellweather for our way of life -- where goes the family, goes society. So, family change may be a symbol of social change.

"Family, as a social institution, may be going through a transformation, with a new family system about to emerge."

There are other explanations for the contemporary focus on families. Some may feel that family is falling apart and must be saved, like an endangered species. Others may feel that changes in society, in the economy and in the political realm have made it difficult for some families to meet society's expectations of them. Still another concern is research that reveals that families are not always happy places to be -- evidence of family violence, sexual abuse, poverty and deprivation is accumulating and can no longer be dismissed (See Maclean's, 27 November 1989).

Yet another explanation might be the wish by some to return to family as they remember it from their childhoods. This is a compelling lure. Since family is an ideal as well as a lived reality, we can long for a family of the past that we see on TV or on a Christmas card. This tendency, psychologists tell us, is more

"Family...may be a "cocoon" which protects us from changes that we can't or don't want to handle."

common in times of distrust and despair with society. We retreat into the past or into a private world where we might feel we at least have some control. Interestingly, the media have hatched a new term for this tendency: cocooning. Family, as we wish it would be, may be a "cocoon" which protects us from changes that we can't or don't want to handle.

The baby boom generation that has influenced most trends, from 1960's music to the fitness craze, is now having children. The concerns of the baby boom generation quickly become the preoccupations of society, so large is their impact. If baby boomers are involved with families, it may not be surprising that family becomes a public concern and issue.

"The ways we bring up children is an issue of importance with respect to future citizens, the future of the economy, and issues of delinquency..."

Many issues of concern today have a family dimension, so, family becomes the focal point for many social concerns in Canada. For example, population aging is the indirect consequence of a reduced birth rate (see McDaniel, 1986). And, of course, families do alot of the caring for older relatives (Kaden and McDaniel, 1990). The ways we bring up children is an issue of importance with respect to future citizens, the future of the economy (including productivity), and issues of delinquency such as drug use, alcohol consumption and crime. Family becomes, then, the place where these issues intersect, and thus the focus of considerable attention.

"...in Canada in the mid-19th century, at the time of rapid industrialization and urbanization, public leaders saw the family as being in peril."

Is the contemporary public interest in family unprecedented? Many people regard family as private and no one's concern but our own (and possibly that of the church, synagogue, or mosque). Thus, it may seem new to have so much public attention focussed on what is thought to be a private institution. It might surprise us to learn that in Canada in the mid-19th century, at the time of rapid industrialization and urbanization, public leaders saw the family as being in peril. Many of the same concerns about family were expressed then as now -- about the instability of the family and the need to return to old values (Gaffield, 1984:28-29).

It may be that public attention to family is good. No social institution is beyond improvement. However, it seems essential that public attention be focussed on contemporary families in Canada as they ARE, not as we wish they were, or fear they might be. This paper's purpose is to review some of the changes in

Canadian families over the past few decades, to discover family trends and patterns today, and to explore some of the implications of these changes for the future. Since Alberta families do not differ markedly from Canadian families in general, the focus here will be on Canadian family trends and patterns, with emphasis on ways in which Alberta patterns differ.

Family Changes

The way in which Canadians live in families has become more diverse. Let's take a stroll, in our imaginations, around a typical block in Alberta in 1986 of 100 households. What kinds of families would we discover? We would find first, that 16 of the 100 would be non-family households, accounted for by the phenomenal growth in living alone, most common among the old (often widows), but also single adults (more often young), and childless (or non-custodial) divorced and separated people (Alberta, 1989: Boyd, 1988:86; Canada, Statistics Canada, 1989). One would be a multiple family household, a significant decline since the 1950's when there would have been around 7. Of the 83 remaining households that are families, diversity is the rule. Sixty-seven would be families with children at home, with 50 of these husband-wife families (including commonlaw or cohabiting couples), and 17 single parent families (with 14 headed by women, and 3 headed by men) (Canada, Statistics Canada, 1984 -- see Figure 1). Of the remaining 16 family households, there would be a number of "empty-nesters" (couples whose children have left home), childless couples, and various other family members living together, such as siblings. In the past two decades in Alberta, the proportion of husband-wife couples with no children at home has doubled (Alberta, 1989), accounted for largely by the increasing number of empty-nesters, but also by the increasing numbers of childless couples.

"In the past two decades in Alberta, the proportion of husband-wife couples with no children at home has doubled..."

Fewer Albertans live on farms now than ever before (7.5% in 1986), yet farms continue to be important in Alberta. It might be interesting to take a similar "stroll" (exactly comparable data to those above are not available) around Alberta's farming areas as we took in all Alberta to see what farm families are like. Of 100 farm families, 29 are husband-wife families with no children at

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home (67 have children at home), and 5 are single parent families (with slightly more than half of these headed by women). The average farm family size at 3.4 is higher than for all Alberta (2.8), and there are slightly more children in farm families (1.6, compared to 1.3 for all Alberta). There are more single people on farms, particularly unmarried men, but fewer divorced people. And, there are more older people -- about 6% over 65 years of age who are reported as family members. [All data here are from a 1989 draft report, "Profile of the People on Alberta Farms" prepared by Mary Fiakpui, Alberta Department of Agriculture.]

"As many as 70% of all Alberta mothers with children under 16 were in the labour force in 1988."

One of the most dramatic changes in Canadian families recently is shown in Figure 2. In 1981, the dual income family had become the dominant family type in Canada, with a sharp decline in the husband working/wife at home family of 1961. In 1981 in Canada, of husband-wife families with two children, only 10% of wives were NOT in the labour force (Boyd, 1988:86). In Alberta in 1986, 54.2% of wives with children were in the labour force, and 67.8% of single mothers (Alberta, 1989). As many as 70% of all Alberta mothers with children under 16 were in the labour force in 1988 (Alberta, 1989). Alberta has the highest level of female labour force participation in Canada (Alberta, 1989). Figure 3 reveals that there is only a negligible difference in women's labour force participation in 1986 in Canada based on the presence or absence of young children, or the presence or absence of spouse. Most of us now balance work and family whether we are men or women (Canada, Canada Employment and Immigration Advisory Council, 1985).

"...(a) Conference Board of Canada (survey), found that 2/3 of employees, male and female, have trouble balancing their work and home responsibilities."

With the two-income family now the norm in Canada today, the challenges of balancing family and work increase. A survey of 11,000 working Canadians completed in 1989 by the Conference Board of Canada, found that 2/3 of employees, male and female, have trouble balancing their work and home responsibilities (Globe and Mail, 29 September 1989, p. B3). The consequence is reduced productivity and increased stress, which translate into increased absenteeism. The problems are not only with child care, although this is certainly an important component, but with the many demands of family (elder care, time with spouse, emergencies, etc.), and work (longer hours associated with promotions, challenges of job transfers, the perception in the work place if an

employee spends time with family, etc.). These are challenges of the present and will likely increase in the future.

As most of us know, the bottom, so to speak, has fallen out of the baby market in Canada. The birth rate in Canada is at an alltime low, with the birth rate in Alberta only slightly above the Canadian average. While women in Canada in 1931 expected to have just over 3 children on average, women today expect fewer than 2! The pattern of declining family size is shown from 1971 to 1981 in Figure 4. Not only are families having fewer children, but fewer families are having children (Alberta, 1989; Boyd, 1988; Canada, 1989). The percentage of childless couples has nearly doubled since 1961, to 22% in 1981 in Canada (Boyd, 1988). This might not be permanent childlessness but, rather, postponement of parenthood. Couples are having children later than they used to, and even single mothers are less often adolescents, but now predominate among women aged 25-34 (Canada, 1984; 1989; McDaniel, 1989b). The percent of never-married single parents in Alberta is now 14%, nearly double what it was in 1976 (Alberta, 1989).

"While women in Canada in 1931 expected to have just over 3 children on average, women today expect fewer than 2!"

The image of families beginning with two never-married young people walking down the aisle needs adjusting in Alberta in the late 1980's. Approximately 1/3 of all marriages in Alberta in 1986 involved at least one person who had been married before and divorced, and this does not include widows, widowers and those who have cohabited, or come into marriage with children but had never married previously (Alberta, 1989). Between the 1981 and 1986 Censuses in Canada, commonlaw unions have increased by 37%, while marriages have increased by only 3% (Statistics Canada Daily, 29 September 1989). Family formation is certainly more complex than it used to be. The divorce rate in Alberta is higher than in the rest of Canada, but divorced Albertans remarry at a higher rate too -- the increase in the rate of divorce has not kept pace with the increase in the rate of marriage. Couples without children tend to divorce more frequently than couples with children.

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One of the striking changes that has occurred in Canadian families has to do with life cycle changes. For women born in the mid-1900's, a typical pattern was that the husband died before the last child had left home, such were the patterns of childbearing (over

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a period of 14 years) and life expectancy. Now, Canadian couples can expect, on average, to spend almost 25 years with no children at home, before one of them dies (Canada, 1989). And childbearing typically takes place over only a two year period! While it used to be that childbearing and childrearing took up all of the couple's life together; now a greater portion of the family's life is devoted to caring for older relatives than to raising children (McDaniel, 1988a; 1989b). A dramatic change indeed! The idea of family caring has shifted, without most of us being aware of it. And, considerable proportions of us have at least one surviving parent well into our midlife years (at age 50, 60% have at least one surviving parent) and later (at age 60, 23% of us) (Computed by author using Statistics Canada Vital Statistics data). Comparable figures for those born in 1910 were 49% at age 50, and 16% at age 60.

We might wonder about the capabilities of families, and of society, to meet the needs of older people. This is a challenge today, and will continue into the future, but it has some unexpected aspects. If we consider demographic dependency (here, a simple proportion of children and of older people to the total population -- without any indication of actual dependency), as shown in Figure 5, it is apparent that total "dependency" in Canada has never been lower than it was in 1981. It is true that a greater proportion of the dependents are older people than was the case earlier in Canada's evolution. This reflects Canada's low birth rate of recent years, the results of which are revealed clearly in Figure 6.

"Families in poverty are often families at risk of serious problems."

Family poverty is something about which we hear a great deal these days. What are the trends and patterns and why is family poverty an issue? Family poverty is important to know about for several reasons. Children are our future and children raised in poverty get sick more often, die more often, and drop out of school more often. Families give children their start in life, and if families cannot afford to provide the basics for their children, we all suffer in the long term. Families in poverty are often families at risk of serious problems. There is both good and bad news about family poverty in Canada. The good news, reported in November 1989 by Statistics Canada is that family incomes are up and poverty levels down since 1981-82. The bad news is that 13.1% of Canadians live in poverty in 1989. More bad news

is that it is not known exactly how far below the poverty line some families live. Still more bad news is that for families where the breadwinner is under 25 years old, or the head of the family is a single mother, poverty is NOT declining. For young families, 31% lived in poverty in 1989, compared to 27% in 1987. For female-headed single parent families, a constant 53% have lived in poverty since the beginning of the 1980's.

"For female-headed single parent families...53% have lived in poverty since the beginning of the 1980's."

With all the changes occurring in Canadian families, what are people's attitudes toward family? There is surprisingly little data on this. One study of Canadian youth (Senate of Canada, 1986) finds that 92% of young people expect to marry and have children, but as modern Canadians, they do NOT expect large families (65% want only one child). Youth are optimistic about the prospects of staying married -- only 1/2 of 1% expect to be divorced or separated, with close to 30% reporting that it is "fairly likely" that they will stay married. Most expect to share equally in housework and childcare in their future families. Most young Canadians (70%) think that the influence of families in the future will remain the same or increase. So, young people in Canada value family, but acknowledge that it has changed in central ways. It might be significant that 70% of young people between 20 and 24 still live at home with their parents.

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New Challenges, Implications and the Future of Families

With us now and in the future are new challenges to families, the full implications of which have yet to emerge. Only a few of these will be discussed here.

Technological change, once thought to be what would enable families to spend more time together, has swept across Canadian families, leaving us uncertain as to what happened. Take microwave ovens, for example. This so called labour saving device was initially thought to be a helpful addition to the family kitchen. Now, there is evidence to suggest that it has played a big role in the demise of the family dinner. In a similar way, dishwashers save time, but undermine the ritual of the family doing dishes together. Walkman and Nintendo have had similar isolating effects on the family's togetherness, as any parent who has

"Technological change...has swept across Canadian families, leaving us uncertain as to what happened."

faced a teenager with headsets on, or with a reluctance to be torn away from an exciting video/computer game, will recognize. But technological impacts on families do not end there. There are home computers, cellular phones, FAX machines at home, and intercoms. All these mean that we need hardly ever talk directly with another human being! It can also mean, with the increased pressures of work for both men and women, that communication with others (by means of these new devices) takes priority over the challenges of communicating in the old fashioned way with family members. Children sometimes comment on how BORING it is just to talk!

New methods for prolonging life by life-support has meant that families must face ethical and moral decisions about the value of the life of a family member in ways never before imagined. With the new reproductive technologies, having babies the old fashioned way, while not likely to go out of existence, could change in almost unimaginable ways. These technologies, already in use today could redefine what families are and blur the boundaries of family (McDaniel, 1988b). There can now be genetic mothers (egg donors), gestation mothers (surrogate mothers), legal mothers and social mothers -- and genetic fathers (sperm donors), biological fathers, legal fathers and social fathers. And we think remarried couples who each bring children into the new marriage and then have their own children, are complicated! It is a brave new world for families today.

"With the new reproductive technologies, having babies the old fashioned way, while not likely to go out of existence, could change in almost unimaginable ways."

What we expect of families, both personally and socially, has changed too. Marriage is no longer only a partnership, but marital partners are expected to be best friends as well as confidantes. Children, with decreasing family size, often have very high expectations placed on them by parents and grandparents. Society expects A LOT of families too. Families should raise children that are creative but law abiding, hard working but not difficult...the list goes on. Families are expected to do more of the caring for older relatives, for the disabled, for the mentally ill and emotionally disturbed, than in the recent past. While some of these new initiatives undoubtedly have good aspects, they also have implications for what families do for society.

"Children, with decreasing family size, often have very high expectations placed on them..."

Attitudes are changing in other ways too. Canadian young people place a lot of value in the family of the future. They seem to be

"Canadian young people place a lot of value in the family of the future."

saying that they are committed to changes in family life, for example in the division of house work and childcare responsibilities. Yet it remains to be seen whether the desire for such changes will translate into making the changes when they form families.

What are the implications of all these changes and challenges for Albertans and Canadians today? For one, the changes have meant that for each of us, there has been a profound change in our day-to-day experience of family. This has left some in confusion as to what is happening, what is likely, what is possible. Not surprisingly, there has been some open disagreement on what the future holds for Canadian families, and what it should hold. At another level, there is debate and discussion about what could and should be done to help families. This puts families on the public policy agenda as valued by us as individuals, and valuable to Canadian society, both now and in the future.

Conclusion

Families HAVE changed in Alberta, in Canada. Families will very likely continue to change in the future. But, families also continue to be valued in meeting our most basic human needs. The challenge to each of us is to build families that allow us best to meet our full human potential and to care for each other. The challenge to policy is to find the means to help families to meet these human needs in the best way they can. The hope is that we can shape a future from an understanding of contemporary family changes and act firmly on that understanding.

"The challenge to each of us is to build families that allow us best to meet our full human potential and to care for each other."

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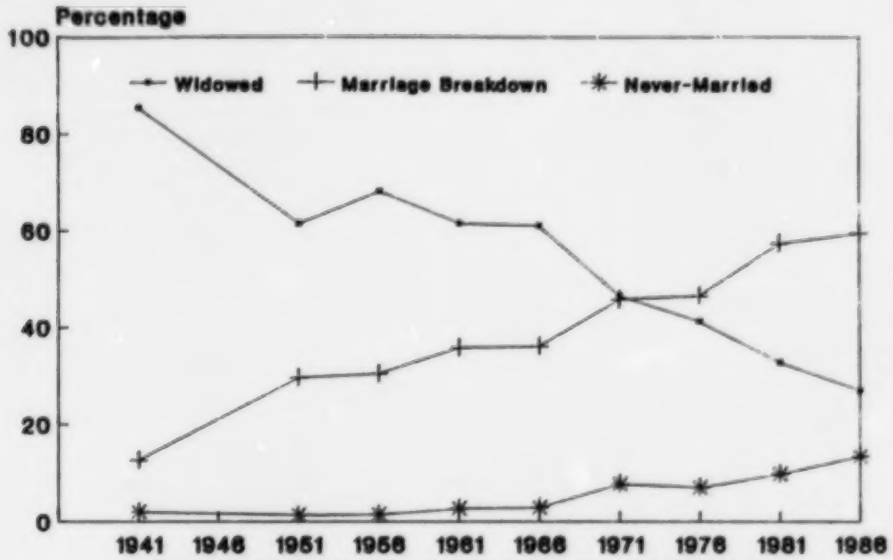
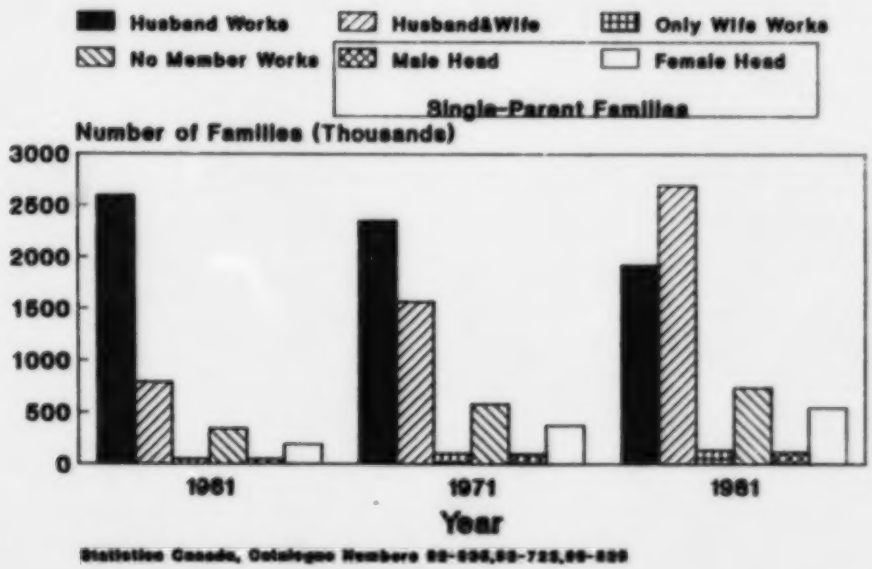
Figure 1: Lone Parent Families by Cause - 1941-1986



Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue Numbers 93-106,92-935 98-1941,98-1951,93-807,93-816,93-811,93-716 and 93-833

Figure 2: Canada, 1961 to 1981 - Family Types



Statistics Canada, Catalogue Numbers 93-836,93-725,93-939

Figure 3: Female Labour Force Participation Rate, Canada 1981-1986

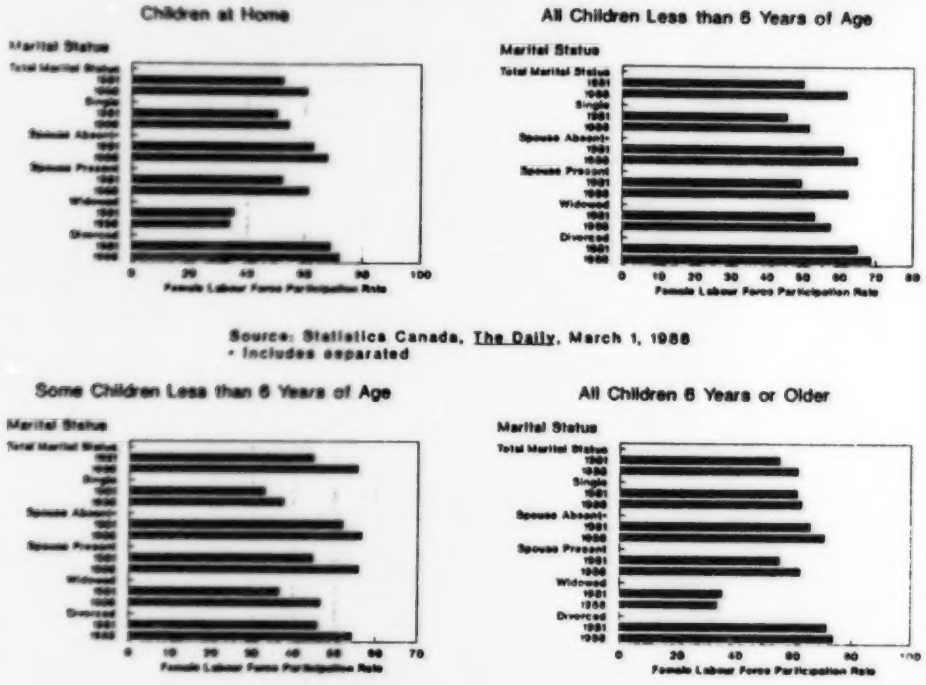
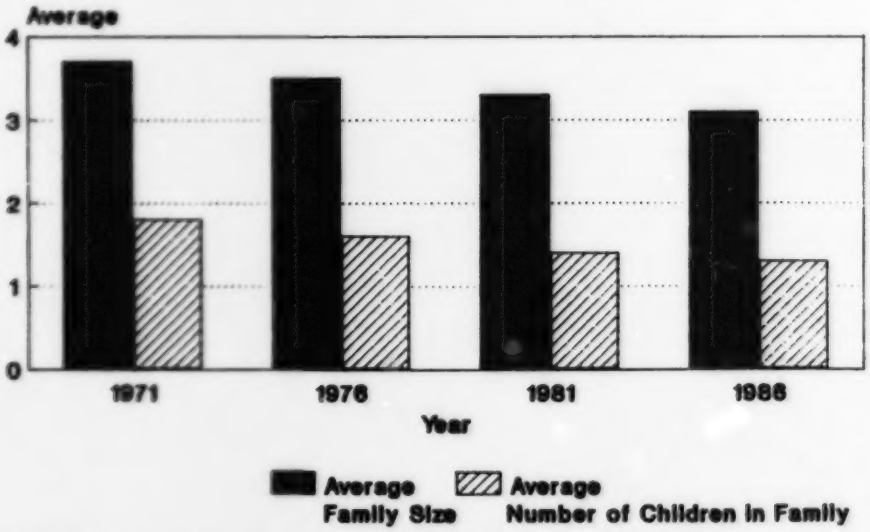
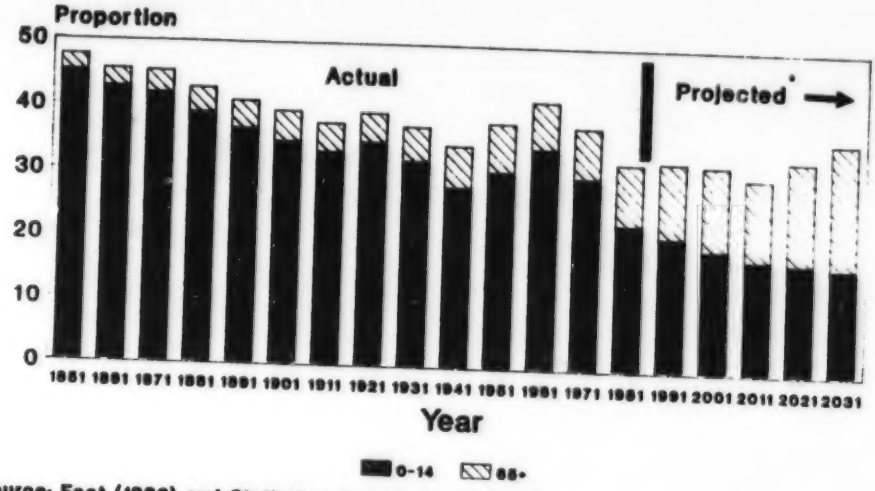

Children at Home
Marital Status
All Children Less than 6 Years of Age
Marital Status
Source: Statistics Canada, The Daily, March 1, 1988
• Includes separated
Some Children Less than 6 Years of Age
Marital Status
All Children 6 Years or Older
Marital Status

Figure 4: Average Family Size and Average Number of Children in Families - Canada, 1971-1986



Statistics Canada Catalogue Numbers 93-106, 93-828

Figure 5: Proportion Dependent - Canada, 1851-2031, Ages 0-14, 65+



Source: Foot (1982) and Statistics Canada Cat.# 91-520
* Statistics Canada Medium Projection (4)

Figure 6: Canada Age-Sex Distribution - 1961 and 1986